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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## A GENERAL VIEW OF GERMAN PEDAGOGY FOR THE BENEFIT OF FOREIGNERS. I

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Germany, and in particular Prussia, is in the fortunate position that its educational life arouses much interest among foreigners, and to a certain extent also much faith. People have let themselves be told that the best teachers in the world are to be found here. The statement is heard that the Germans are to a man born pedagogues. Here the best organized schools are looked for with confidence, and the purest and most certain methods expected. Year by year numerous foreigners come to Germany to study our schools and educational arrangements as well as our pedagogic theories and convictions, and they come not only from the great neighboring countries or from the rest of Europe, not even merely from the United States, that country far less remote in point of culture than in geographical position, but from almost every corner of the civilized world. This is, of course, partly due to the general increase in the taste for, or habit of, traveling and in the facilities for it; and they come also, it is true, to examine our industrial, administrative, and technical institutions, just as they visit our universities and scientific colleges, or study our military life.

But to the province of education access is still easier, and the dread of inconvenient competition can hardly come obstructively into play here. It is true, the idea of the value of educational institutions for the outward, economic, and political success of

nations is close at hand, and in England the opinion has repeatedly been expressed of late that Germany owes her recent successes in her foreign policy to her good schools, and that for this reason, these should be studied and imitated as much as possible. But for the most part the interest is probably founded upon a freer, not to say a more idealistic basis.

The right form of human education is a perpetual, unfathomable problem, with which the whole world is confronted, and at which the nations must work with, not against, one another. Every country owes it to itself and to its future to apply the greatest earnestness to it, and in no case will it be taken amiss if a nation strives, by putting forth its utmost efforts, to advance to or maintain its position in the front rank in this domain; nor is it on this account looked upon with such suspicion as is excited by military armaments, let us say, or plans of commercial expansion. Moreover, the interest in education is everywhere unmistakably on the increase; and it is on the increase after having been particularly lively in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and on into the first part of the nineteenth. This increase is indeed connected now, more closely than before, with the idea of the greatest national efficiency, and not so much with that of individual perfection. It is also connected with the still more generally felt pressure of the difficulty of giving young people a real insight into the complicated culture of the present day. In a word, men are speculating, and seeking, and looking about them, and would fain somewhere find a talisman, or at least a reliably working organization and method, that might be transferred and adopted.

So definite an expectation must perhaps always meet with disappointment—disappointment, inasmuch as the perfect is not in reality to be found, while to the relatively best there clings always “the defects of its qualities;” or again, disappointment, inasmuch as transference to a different nationality and civilization is not really possible. To return to our particular case, unmingled satisfaction is certainly rarely the final impression carried away by foreigners who visit Germany in connection with her educational institutions and achievements; or, if it be so, then

the picture they have obtained is not perhaps the objectively correct one, inasmuch as the field of observation was too limited. For how many things are indispensable to the complete knowledge of the reality! Two prejudices in particular stand in the way, both indeed easy to understand, yet both very apt to lead to error.

It is a pure assumption to suppose that the capital must display in typical perfection the characteristics of the country as a whole. In this matter one almost always argues from the relation of France to its capital, although even there, one may easily be led astray by identifying what is Parisian with what is French. But as surely as London is not England, St. Petersburg not Russia, New York not North America, equally, and perhaps even more, certain is it that Berlin is not Germany, nor even Prussia. The variety of provinces and races is far too great for that to be possible, while each one has no small degree of freedom of development and organization. And precisely for educational purposes, a great city, and more especially one that has grown up with a leap and is still feverishly developing, offers particularly unfavorable conditions. Gigantic schools with every class too full; great distances involving waste of time for pupils and teachers; estrangement of young people from the life of nature; impairment of a healthy family life by the hurry and tension of business or profession; a one-sided intellectual precocity; the difficulty of a more intimate intercourse between pupils and teachers due to large numbers; the inevitable tendency to make educational measures mechanical—all these contribute a series of obviously unfavorable conditions and ought to prevent one from seeking here the typical picture. Yet for all that, may not the brightest teachers be expected to congregate in the capital, perhaps to be drawn thither by a process of sifting from every part of the country? This again would apply very well to the French capital, toward which every able man in the land strives as the only honorable field of activity for his powers. But it does not by any means apply to Germany, which is indeed not even a unified state, and which possesses not only a special center for culture in Saxony or Bavaria, but also a number of other places,

deserving of some renown, and proud of their own individuality. And, certain as it is that it would be mistaken and unfair not to recognize, in the educational domain as well as in others, a high general level of efficiency, intelligence, industry, and professional zeal in the capital of the empire together with its suburbs, yet true pedagogic activity and striving can in more than one respect develop more easily outside it. In addition to the disadvantages mentioned above, one need only think of the absence or remoteness of playgrounds, and of the lack of time for voluntary educational activity in addition to school lessons, to say nothing of the confined courtyards of most of the newer schools, in which the young people can only move decorously to and fro a little, instead of romping as is their just due.

Little then can a visit to the capital or to a part of its schools (for in reality it must always be only a small part that is visited by a single foreigner) suffice for the formation of correct judgment about German school education. The result must in every way remain equally untrustworthy where there is limitation to any one portion of the field.

A second widespread prejudice exists to the effect that in Germany, more especially in Prussia, education is so strictly regulated by a central authority that one cannot expect to find any considerable dissimilarity between the particular schools, provinces, or persons. This conception is due to the fact that in Prussia the state government did actually obtain control over education, and subjected it to fixed, universally valid standards, at a time when in other countries, and more especially in England, such an official control was not even thought of, while in others again uniformity was obtained by mere tradition and custom. This tradition was indeed based upon a conscious systematic control from an earlier period, namely, that exercised by the church, or more particularly by the Order of the Jesuits. But their organizing activity had in past centuries worked more silently through a similarity, a uniformity of spirit, and indeed with much less variety of inner organization, but not by means of explicit announcement and legal enforcement. And accordingly these latter countries have been much less progressive than Prus-

sia, where men were unceasingly pondering, experimenting, and correcting. For even in England had not the rule of tradition been stricter than could have been accomplished by control from any central office whatsoever? Custom binds more firmly than command or laws; sometimes its effects will be even more paralyzing.

Now it must be admitted that in Prussia from the first interference of government up to the present time there has been no lack of regulation; curricula, plans of organization for different kinds of schools, examining regulations, and the arrangement of many matters of detail—these have followed one another until this day. The other German states followed suit either at once or little by little, with similar regulations, or, as in the case of those of South Germany, undertook a no less precise control on their own account, yet always in the belief that the best results obtained in particular cases should give results of value to the community, and that the best-thought-out system should be made into a universal standard. But it would nevertheless be an error to suppose that this official standardizing applied to everything. Some characters will, it is true, always be disposed to regard and interpret the standards set up by the authorities as direct commands. These are, of course, characters of a certain mediocrity, and there has been no lack of headmasters or inspectors of this kind. Nevertheless, the tendency of the government, at any rate in the larger state of Prussia, has never been to suppress all freedom of movement. One need only look into the work of Wiese-Kübler upon the rules and regulations for secondary schools, to see how many instructions of their own the particular provinces have issued, or how they possess, in their "Headmasters' Meetings" (*Direktoren-Versammlungen*) a kind of school parliament of their own. It should further be observed how different the methods of introduction of the various teachers may be, and finally, how different the general tone of the schools is, according to the personality of the headmaster and of the most influential members of the staff. To the question, for instance, whether the Prussian *Gymnasien* are strict or lenient in their demands for discipline and diligence, or

whether the relations between teachers and pupils are harsh or friendly, the answer would, after all, have to depend upon the school and the character of its personal management. Thus it is not a matter in which it is easy to base general conclusions upon particular impressions. To arrive at tenable opinions through one's own observation, it would be necessary not only to extend them over a very considerable time—a much longer time than most visitors from abroad have at their disposal—but also to get to know and to compare widely separated parts of the country. But the most important point is that after a century in which the tendency toward uniformity has, after all, predominated, it is at present impossible not to recognize the presence, in just the most influential quarter, namely on the part of the highest educational authorities in Prussia, of a readiness to grant a considerable freedom of organization and of self-modification to the separate schools. Moreover, instead of the former limited numbers of different kinds of secondary schools (*Gymnasium* and *Realschule*), a whole series of forms have been officially recognized and favored.

Almost all visitors to a foreign country are wont to sum up their impressions in praise or blame, at least the impressions which they have received in particular departments. The observer's character, range of view, and other personal factors, affect the result. Many are somewhat led astray by the natural attraction of the new and strange; in many the strange inspires rather a sense of uneasiness and distrust. On the other hand, what one has always heard and learned has no small influence, and this influence is a twofold one. Many do not see what is foreign through their own eyes at all, but through the colored spectacles which they bring with them.

Others perceive first and foremost the points in which the new differs from the picture which they have accepted of it, fall from one fit of astonishment into another, and exaggerate to themselves and others the features which strike them. If you read a book or newspaper article written by a foreigner about your own country, you almost always find that the praise or blame is wrongly distributed and meted out. Further, national

states of opinion play a particularly important part. It has long been the custom of the French not to trouble seriously about foreign culture, and to be very prone to see a sort of barbarism beyond their own frontiers—at any rate in the direction of the East. But in the latter decades their opinion has veered round, and we now have unduly favorable judgments oftener than disparaging ones from that quarter.

People who think that something badly needs reform in their own country are very fond of pointing to a foreign one as a model. Many of our educational arrangements have in recent times met with much praise of this kind from England also, and as has already been mentioned, it is especially to our schools that people are inclined to attribute the reason of the nation's outward progress. The more penetrating English observers distinguish very sharply between what is good in our education and those details in which it is altogether surpassed by the English: and they are quite right in so distinguishing, even if they perhaps lay on both the lights and shades somewhat too heavily. The numerous Russians who come here, before all things filled with the natural desire to remedy the internal defects of their own country by means of definite new regulations, for the most part imagine the transference of foreign structures to their own soil to be too easy and too practicable. They firmly believe, too, that they will find in our country something that is supposed to be characteristic of us, although it is not quite so truly so, namely, a hard and fast regulation, penetrating into every matter of detail, definitely prescribed and universally followed methods of instruction, and so on. All this they would like to see and inquire into, mostly in quite a short time, that they may carry it home with them, together with German theoretical pedagogics in a single handy volume. This often undeniably touching zeal for the raising of their nation does not, it must be confessed, give much hope of success. But it is the American visitors to our country who are wont to obtain the fullest information: and it is they too who most often take the broadest pedagogic field of view, who are not held in check by a specifically national, centuries-old tradition in this particular, and who show themselves



governed rather by calm, clear will than by restless feeling. Perhaps they are inclined to expect too much from the establishment of an elaborate theory, of a truly model organization. This, young men and young nations seem to have in common, and one must not cut off such a hope, even if it is bound to lead to disappointments.

It is indeed just those who approach German schools and education with too favorable expectations who cannot escape disappointments. There are indubitably points at which the stagnation has been greater than the advance of time would seem to allow. Some factors have not come into force there which are working well in certain other countries. Much is after all more rigidly mechanical there than the specialists concerned are themselves aware; more rigidly mechanical than is consistent with genuine life. Some particular new impulses have not yet found a sufficiently friendly reception there. It is not unusual to encounter there the belief in what has long been customary as though it were the same as the well tried. All these impressions may be received; no reasonable man in Germany will be surprised at, or protest against, it. On the contrary it cannot but be painful, if the world shows that it expects too much of us. More certain than the well-known dictum of the philosopher, that all that is real is reasonable, would be this other, that all that is real among men and which has been realized by men, in some degree falls short of the reasonable, and, still more certainly, of the perfect. In truth, even that which is admittedly good may have a very dark side.

I should like to try and give a picture of German education as it appears to me, and as I think that it should be seen by the foreigner. Merely as an introduction to this, what has been said already would be too extensive; fortunately, in the course of it, some of the features of the picture that is to be drawn have been sketched in anticipation.

*[To be continued]*